

Bro. Weber's Experience as Related in His Meetings

by Martin Knapp

Bro. Weber shares his powerful testimony of conversion from Catholicism to Christianity, highlighting God's grace and the call to evangelism.

Scripture: Isaiah 1:18, Matthew 28:19, Acts 3:19, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 4:13, James 1:22, 1 Peter 4:10, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Personal Conversion", "Christian Testimony"

Description

Martin Knapp shares his personal journey of conversion from Roman Catholicism to becoming a devout Methodist, highlighting the struggles, temptations, and transformations he experienced along the way. Despite facing challenges and doubts, he ultimately finds salvation and a calling to the ministry, leading to a life dedicated to serving God and spreading His word through evangelism and charitable works.

Transcript

There is generally a great deal of curiosity exhibited when it is announced that I am to tell "How the Lord converted me, a Roman Catholic."

People often say, "What nationality are you, Mr. Weber?" Some think an Irishman, some a Dutchman, and some one thing and some another. I will give you my parentage, and you can judge for yourself.

My father was born in the province of Alsace, in the possession of the French government at that time; and my mother in that good old Buckeye State, Ohio; and I was born in Cincinnati, O., so now you can judge for yourself.

I inherited my Catholicism from my father's side, as his father was one of those wool-dyed Catholics. With him that which did not point to Rome was not anything. My early teaching was "that all Protestants would surely go to hell, as they did not belong to The Church; no matter how good they were, they surely would be lost."

I could see no difference in the other boys with whom I played, as they acted just as I did and the rest of the Protestant boys, and why they should be lost I could not understand. My grandfather, called one of the very best Romanists, would he and get drunk; my father, with the rest of us would drink beer, and Sunday afternoons go to a hilltop resort kept by one of my uncles, and there spend the rest of the day drinking and

dancing. Well, if this was religion, and I could go to heaven and do thus, it seemed queer to me.

In my early life, I had an ambition to become a rich man I knew to become a rich man a boy must begin young; so I would save my money or borrow it from my mother, and go out during vacation, and sell matches, fans, or brooms: one day, when offering brooms for sale in a saloon, I said, "Mister, don't you want to buy a broom?" He said, "No, but I want to buy you."

"What do you mean?" I said. Then he told me he wanted me to come and tend bar in his saloon. My heart just leaped for joy, for now I could become a business man. I went home in high glee, told my proposed offer to my mother, but she objected; being a spoiled boy, I pleaded, and persuaded my father to go down and see the man, and I was sure they would let me go. When we arrived at the saloon, I said, "Here it is, pa," but he passed by; he seemed in deep meditation. I think something like this passed through his mind: "When I married, like all Germans, I liked a glass of beer, and now I am its slave, drink and kindred vices are bearing me down, and now to put my innocent boy on the same road I cannot." Then I began to plead with him to go in and see the man. At last I prevailed. The man received us with open arms and said, "I want your boy." When we reached home my ma and pa conferred with each other, and decided I should go to school, but I cried and tore around, -- a spoiled boy, you see, -- and said, "Now, when I want to work you won't let me."

When Monday morning came, I was up bright and early, and ma said, "Joe, I want you to go to school," but I said, "I am going down to try it anyhow." When I arrived there, I was so small that he had to build a rack about eight inches behind the counter, so I might deal out hell and damnation to the people. This is one of the blackest spots in my life, and did I not read in Isa. i. 18, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow," I could never stand before a congregation and preach. Oh, the depths of God's love and forgiveness! My father had come home from the war worse than when he went in. The habit of drink had now completely overcome him. My poor mother, heart-broken and sad, decided it would be best for them to move away from Cincinnati; my grandfather had died, and left father considerable, and it was fast being spent in the saloons, so they bought a place in Hamilton, O., and thither they went; but I remained at Cincinnati. My father found associates there, and soon was being lost in drink again. I being the oldest boy, my mother yearned to have me near her, and she wanted me to come home and live. Then I said, "Mamma, I am such a big boy, and you need my help; if you will get me a job, I will come home." So a job was procured at the paper-mill.

Before this time, I was not very bad, I cannot remember of ever having sworn; but here at the mill and the place in which I lived I became acquainted with some very bad boys and men, who taught me many bad habits.

We organized a minstrel troupe, and soon I became an expert dancer, and could dance songs and dances, jigs, clogs, etc., and was going on the stage. I told my mother about my project, and she said, "If you go I will send the strong arm of law after you, and put you where the dogs won't bite you." I did not want to go where the dogs would not bite; so I desisted. Oh, if every mother would put her foot down and say, "I am boss."

Then I persuaded my ma to buy me a violin, and soon I became proficient enough so I could play at dances.

I want to tell you I know all about dances, I have been to the highest and lowest. I am often asked, "Is there any harm in a select parlor dance?" You might as well ask me if there is any harm in stealing. I've seen the

purest led forth by one of these lepers of society, whose bosom swells with lust to ruin the fair; I've had them come to me with their plans, by which they might lead that pure, innocent daughter of yours to obey their lust, and bring her disgraced to her home. Why, the chief of police at New York say six-tenths of the fallen women of that city say, "their first step to ruin was from the dance," and then you Christian people have dances at your home. Shame on you! it will be shame when you get in the presence of God!

After having labored in the paper-mill about two years, I then went to work for the Cincinnati Ice Company, who were running a branch office at Hamilton, O., and there fell in with worse company than ever, -- now saloons and breweries were my haunts, and I learned to love the drink more and more, and sometimes, I sorry to say, -- I drank till I would reel! This continued till about the time the crusade opened their fire on the saloon. One evening, when going with the boys to hear Carl Schurz speak, I drank a glass of beer and it made me sick--thank God and I vowed a vow never to touch it again; and promised the boys five dollars if they saw me drinking. The boys laughed and said, "We'll soon have five dollars to go on a spree." I still continued to drink whiskey till the following March, and abandoned it forever. This was the beginning of a new life. Praise God!

After having labored for the ice company four years, I engaged with Peter Heck to learn the trade of carriage trimming, and remained with him about six months.

The exposition was going on at Cincinnati, and I concluded to go on a visit there. While there I saw an advertisement, -- "Wanted, a boy, who has had experience in carriage trimming." So I went to the carriage factory on Freeman Street, near Lincoln Park, and met the proprietor, James Curry, who engaged me. I went home, glad of the chance, and told my mother, who sighed and wanted me to remain home. Often she would approach me, and tell me something she heard about me, and, boy-like, I would deny it. Now, to go to Cincinnati, and there, perhaps, fall in with a rougher class of people, no wonder she did not favor the plan.

I told my employer a lie, to get released. I'm sorry for it now. The time came for me to go. My valise packed, my mother's arms around me, and I must go. The tears streaming down my cheeks, we parted, and my mother cried, "My poor boy is lost." When about half a square from home, I raised my eyes to heaven, and there prayed and said, "Lord, help me to be a better boy." That prayer, I believe, was heard. Praise God!

I went to Cincinnati, and if ever a person tried to be a devout Romanist I tried. No Sunday ever came unless you would see me wending my way to the Bank Street Roman Church. When I would behold these poor people agonizing in the same manner I was; bowing before images, anointing themselves with holy water; yet going away with sorrow and sadness, and the load of guilt on them, my poor heart would yearn for relief, but none came. Day after day my heart would cry out, "Oh, that I knew where to find Him! "

One Sunday, being lonesome and troubled, I wended my way over the Rhine, and the saloons, dance halls, and variety theaters. Hearing the patter of feet of the ballet dancers, I went in and ordered a bottle of mineral water. Before, these things charmed me, but now my heart yearned for something better. I did not remain there long, and went to the Washington Park, and, while there, I saw a large crowd gathered under the arch that extended from the exposition building to the art gallery in the park. So, curiosity attracted me to the crowd, and, while there, I cannot remember the text or a particle of the sermon, but when they began to sing, "Almost Persuaded," the music charmed me. I was riveted to the spot. The minister lined the hymn, and when he reached the last verse and the last four lines, he read,

"Almost persuaded, now to believe;

Almost persuaded, Christ to receive."

Still, I was not moved much. Then he read,

"Almost cannot avail,

Almost is but to fail .

Sad, sad that bitter wail,

Almost, but lost!"

When he said "Lost," I never had anything to pierce my heart through as this did; it seemed as though a dagger pierced my heart; and, for a moment, I quivered, but with lightning thought I raised my eyes to heaven and my heart to God, and said, "I will not be lost, I'll be saved." And as if tons of weight had been lifted, my burden was gone, my sin-sick soul free. I was enraptured with joy indescribable. The song went on, the meeting dismissed, but still I stood transfixed, riveted to the spot. The preacher -- Joseph Emery, City Missionary -- came and asked me to go to the Christian Association. Then the tears streamed down my cheeks.

I started for my home. The sun shone with brighter brilliancy, the grass looked greener, the faces of the people seemed different, my soul was filled, I was free. Praise the Lord

That night I went to the Y. M. C. A., was met by the boys at the door, and given a royal welcome, and a book to sing.

After the Sermon the invitation was given for all to hold up their hands, who wanted the prayers of God's people. My hand was up, and they gathered around and prayed for me; but all this time I did not know what was the matter with me. I asked the boys "when there would be another meeting like this." So they told me to come down Wednesday evening. I could hardly wait till the time came. Wednesday evening found me there, and they took me to St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church, corner Smith and Seventh Streets. Dr. C. H. Payne was pastor. The power of God was among the people, and at the close an invitation was given to all those wanting the prayers of God's people to rise. I stood up and soon they gathered around me and began to pray. The more they prayed the happier I got, but still I could not imagine what made me so happy, so I said, "What is the matter with me?" and they told me I was converted. I shouted,

Glory to God, I'm saved." I went home and began telling the people what Jesus did for me.

The following Sunday I went to the Christian Association building, expecting to find a Sunday School, but, to my disappointment, I found it locked.

The following Sunday I said, "Maybe they have a Sunday School at that church where they told me I was converted."

As I arrived there I found two men -- Thompson and Wolf, class-leaders -- going into the church. I inquired if they had a Sunday School, but they said, "No, we have a class meeting." A class meeting -- I did not know what a class meeting was, but consented, and was shown into a small room with a row of chairs on each side. I took my position near the door, so that if it did not suit me I could go out. They gave me a book and

we sang, and then all knelt and they prayed for me; so my fears began to subside. The class-leader read, and then exhorted each to speak, and my turn came, so I jumped up and said, "I'm saved!" and sat down. The leader at its close asked me to come again, but I said, "I won't have to be a Methodist if I come?" He answers, "No, no." Thank God, it was not long till I wanted to be a Methodist, and I'm a Methodist from my head to my feet.

I began to long for an acquaintance of my youth, so I renewed old friendship with one of the boys whose mother was a good Christian. He purposed a walk, and when about a half square from his home, whom should we meet but Mr. Thompson, the classleader, who was very glad, and said, "I want you to teach a Sunday School class." When we arrived at the mission school we found hundreds of little street Arabs gathered, who howled and stormed around—a queer sight for me, who had been a Romanist, where order prevails. I was given of a class of boys to keep them quiet, so I began to act, when one boy pulled my coat and another squinted at me. Knowing that order was heaven's first law, I took one of the boys and set him down pretty hard, so much so that the other boys began to fear lest they would be treated the same. Mr. Thompson insisted I must take a class. I said, "I have no Bible." A Testament and a Teacher's Journal were given me, and now I was to become a Sunday School teacher. That week I studied and prayed over my lessons, but when Sunday came I forgot the entire lesson and could only tell the boys what Jesus did for me. God helped me to win my boys, and ere long, with presents, pennies, and a visit to their parents, their little hearts were won for Jesus. Soon I must go and help them in the street meetings, where we were hooted and sometimes had dead animals thrown at us.

My relatives, hearing I had become a Protestant, sent for me, and then ridiculed my religion and said, "You will go where all the crazy Methodists go to the lunatic asylum." I accepted a position on the road to travel for a firm, and was gone about six months. Hearing Moody was in Chicago, I visited his meetings, received a special blessing. Came home and found my mother needed winter supplies, and gave her all my money but enough to pay my fare to Cincinnati and two weeks' board. I felt a call to the ministry, but used to put it off by saying, "Lord, I am too ignorant and cannot go to school; I have no money."

Yet this spirit followed me, and one Friday afternoon alone in my room, when my money was all gone and nothing to pay my board, I knelt and said, "Now, Lord, I want to know if you want me to preach; I want to know by you giving me a sign something I can see and feel with my hands." I seemed to hear a voice say, "Well, what shall I give you?" -- "Lord, lay a piece of money before me in the space of a week," I said. Many times I would get up and look all around the room, looking for the money; then when passing along the street I would see the sun shining on something and would soon discover it was a piece of tin or glass. Yet my faith was, if God wanted me he would surely send the money. My relatives long before had become reconciled, and I went to my aunt and told her my circumstances, and she invited me to her home. This was Wednesday eve. I told her I was going to the Methodist church at Mount Auburn. Rev. W. W. Case was pastor then, and that evening was receiving probationers from the recent revival. After the dismissal, while speaking with a young man and telling him what Jesus had done for me, I lifted my eyes, and there, about twenty feet off, beheld two shining objects on the floor. My whole life passed before me in a panoramic vision, and such scintillations of God's glory as I never beheld before; and when I picked up these two shining objects, -- they were two bright pennies, -- as if they had been polished by angelic hands in glory, I gave them to the pastor and started home, the stars in their course seemed to sing, the air buoyed me up, and when I arrived home my aunt beheld my face, which must have shone like a mirror, and said, "Why, Joe, what is the matter with you?" I told her my prayer and the finding of the money, and she exclaimed, "You must go to school." The next morning I saw my pastor, Rev. H. B. Ridgeway, but

received no encouragement from him , but Idetermined to go to the Ohio Wesleyan University, at Delaware, O., that fall. That night I askedGod for a job, got his assurance, and told my aunty in the morning, "I was going to get a job." Shesaid, "Where?" -- "I do not know, God is going to give me a job." She gave me a little money tobuy a lunch, but this gave a poor beggar by the library and stayed there till about four o'clock, andwent to Emerson & Fisher's carriage factory, comer John and Findlay streets, and asked for a job,and they said, "We want good; sober men." When I told them I was a Christian, they said, "Somuch the better." On the following Monday I went to the factory, but my bench was not ready. OnWednesday began work, and soon was getting as much as the foreman in the shop.

When the Saturday evening came I asked the boys if they paid off this evening. They said,"No, on Monday." When going home I said, "Lord, I have no money for Sunday School tomorrow."The Lord seemed to say, "Have I not provided for you before? can I not provide for you again?" I had not gone ten steps until I found money for Sunday School.

That fall I started to school at Delaware, O., and remained there from 1877 to 1881,making my own money and giving away one-tenth and more to God.

I joined the Central Ohio conference in the fall of 1881, and was appointed to Lima, O.;and when going to Lima I found between eight and nine hundred dollars in my bank account aheadafter having paid my own way through school. I found three appointments, but this did not keep mebusy, so I took up another. The fruits of this year were over two hundred conversions, two newchurches, and the repairing of another, besides going away and helping in three other meetings,having between one and two hundred more conversions. All this time, I felt the call to theevangalistic field. My presiding elder did his best to retain me on his district, but in 188 lwithdrew from the conference to go into my life's work. These years God has honored my poorlabors with His divine seal, and many thousands have been converted and sanctified, and God hashelped me to give away over eleven thousand dollars for the education of young men for theministry, colleges, poor preachers, orphans, churches, and the benevolences of the church. To Godbe all the honor and glory, Amen. Do not think I have not made mistakes since I believed, but manytimes have I grieved the Spirit of God and done that which I ought not to have done, but these allhave been forgiven, and I am saved by his precious blood. Amen.

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